

Engineers move closer to deployment

Training prepares Soldiers for volatile environment

by Dennis Johnson
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Bamberg's 54th Engineer Battalion is now midway through training required for its return to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) this fall.



Dennis Johnson

A costumed 9th Engineer Battalion Soldier role plays as a hostile insurgent during urban operations training for 54th Engineer Battalion Soldiers en route to Operation Iraqi Freedom later this year.

Battalion Soldiers recently convoyed heavy trucks and loaded armored earth movers and armored personnel carriers onto trains for transport to the Kitzingen local training area, better known as Klosterforst, for two weeks of field training June 8–20.

The battalion trained on tasks required of every U.S. Army, Europe, unit returning to Iraq.

“Our training started in March with phase one of training for Iraq at Grafenwoehr,” said Maj. Tim Holman, battalion operations officer. “We certified platoons on engineer tasks – the engineer qualification tables.”

Returning to Bamberg, Soldiers completed phase two at the local training area; platoon-level situational training exercises, including an emphasis in operations in urban environments, the type of warfare they’re likely to encounter in Iraq.

Training at Kitzingen got the Soldiers away from their own local training area and into a new locale. “Kitzingen is a more unknown environment for our Soldiers from Bamberg. You really have to read the maps and understand the terrain here,” Holman said.

The battalion’s companies continued their required tasks and focused on platoon and company-level operations. Emphasis remained on urban environment operations and the recognition and reaction to improvised explosive devices (IED), a dominant threat to Soldiers in Iraq.

The final piece of training to certify the battalion ready to return to OIF is phase four, to be completed at the Grafenwoehr Training Area in August and September. The battalion will receive more urban warfare training, training on IED recognition and gunnery practice.

“We conducted our engineer training in March. We’re engineers. We feel we’re fully trained in those tasks, now our focus is on urban operations,” Holman said.

Soldiers of Schweinfurt’s 9th Eng. Bn., who returned from Iraq in February, assisted the 54th with their training in Kitzingen.

“It’s interesting to get their perspective because OIF 1 was different from what it is now,” said 1st Lt. Kyle Clay, Company B executive officer and an OIF 1 veteran. “There are things we can take away from what they went through. I think the difference is just in the way of fighting – there are a lot of suicide bombers and IEDs now. People will wait for you to pass and then drive (a suicide bomb-laden car) right into you.”

“I think we’re ready for what they’ll throw at us,” Clay said.

“Our goal here is to have the exercise run for 72 hours straight,” Holman said, “so you’ll see a lot of guys with blood-shot eyes from being up preparing orders, conducting rehearsals and executing missions.”

At the Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) site, Company A Soldiers completed three days of training with an evening exercise, cordoning off a village and searching for weapons and suspected insurgents. While the Soldiers planned their mission and mounted their vehicles, in the village the insurgents set booby-traps and planned an ambush.

Dressed in the long flowing garb of the Middle East, opposition forces were played by 29 Soldiers of the 9th Eng. Bn.

Spc. Alex Robinson camouflaged a simulated IED to be triggered by a trip wire across one of the two roads leading into the MOUT site village.

“We’ve set up pyrotechnics and booby traps to simulate IEDs. We also have simulated mortars because when we were down there we experienced a lot of mortars – inaccurate, but it’ll be something they’ll find there,” Robinson said.

“When you train for urban operations, usually the opposition force wins. We don’t want to make it too easy. The point is to teach them a lesson,” he added.

Having recently returned from Iraq, Robinson also has experience dealing with the local population.

“Just be aware of your surroundings. You really can’t trust the locals; they’re so poor they’ll do anything for money. But we treat them with respect and I think that helps build good relations.”

Six area scouts earn Eagle award

by Larry Reilly
The Point

Only four percent of all boys who join the Boy Scouts achieve its highest rank of Eagle Scout. However, six area scouts were recently awarded the Eagle badge.

Four scouts from Wuerzburg earned the badge. Billy Johnson and Tyson Rydalch of Troop 111 and Sean Hipe and Clint Loyd from Troop 62 received their eagle awards during a court of honor ceremony in Normandy, France.

Jerimiah Quinn of Troop 55 in Schweinfurt also received his award at Normandy, and Mike Ewing of Troop 97 in Ansbach also recently received the award.

Though achieving the rank of Eagle Scout may take four to five years of their lives, most scouts fall short because of a major social change in their lives – entering high school.

“Like me, a lot of scouts earn their Life Badge while they are in the eighth grade but they don’t stay with the program to earn their Eagle when they enter high school,” said Billy Johnson. “Of course there are a lot of things going on in high school, but I really believe earning the Eagle badge is more important.”

Other notables who share Johnson’s belief include former President Gerald Ford, former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo West and current Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

“I never really set a personal goal of achieving the rank of Eagle. I just have a personal goal of being the best at whatever I do,” said Sean Hipe, who achieved the rank in four years.

There is more to earning the badge than just staying in the scouting program. Each scout has to earn 21 merit badges, 12 of which are required. After earning their Star badge they must increase their participation in leadership roles and become more involved in their community.



From left to right, Sean Hipe, Billy Johnson and Tyson Rydalch stand shoulder to shoulder on the shores of Normandy, France, after receiving their Eagle Scout awards.



Courtesy photos

Clint Loyd, left, puts the parent’s pin on his father, Cliff Loyd, as his father pins the Eagle badge on Clint.

A final Eagle requirement is to coordinate and complete a project that benefits the community. Of the six new Eagle scouts, some chose to do a project in their own community while others ventured elsewhere.

“I decided to renovate the community gazebo on Victory Drive on Leighton Barracks as my community project,” said Johnson, who said his project coordination involved working with many people both German and American.

“Many of my fellow scouts and our family members helped sand down, paint and refurbish the gazebo and its barbecue pit. I also got support from local German firms that donated the needed supplies,” Johnson said. “I’ve received a lot of thanks from those who now use the gazebo.”

Sean Hipe said his thanks comes from a Lithuanian home for disabled children.

“My parents have friends associated with the home and asked if the children needed anything in particular,” he said, learning the children were in need of clothing and toys. Hipe set up a clothes drive around the Wuerzburg community last fall for his community service project.

“I was able to coordinate with the hospital, PX and shopette to have collection boxes put in the facilities,” Hipe said. “I coordinated with the children’s home and sent a truckload of clothes and toys this February and April.”

Though the Eagle badge is the highest and final achievement a scout can earn, it doesn’t mean they have to retire their Boy Scout uniforms.

“I plan to stay active with Troop 62 to help encourage other scouts to earn their Eagle badge,” Hipe said.



Photos by Staff Sgt. Allen Byrd

Representing Wuerzburg MEDDAC’s nine area clinics at the change of commander were commanders and the unit guidons.

Hospital commands split

The 67th Combat Support Hospital and U.S. Army Medical Department Activity, Wuerzburg, split into two separate commands July 6 at change of command ceremonies at Victory Park on Leighton Barracks.

Outgoing commander Col. Patricia Lillis-Hearne, the last dual-hatted commander of one of the Army’s unique combined organizations, relinquished command of the 67th CSH to Col. Mark Bither, and passed the USAMEDDAC guidon to Col. Dallas Homas.

Europe Regional Medical Command commander Brig. Gen. Carla Hawley-Bowland and 30th Medical Brigade commander Col. Steven Swann presided over ceremonies.

Lillis-Hearne led the 67th CSH deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom last year. Her support network consists of husband James, and son James Michael and daughter



Homas

Katie. She is en route to the Air University College for Strategic Leadership at Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base, Ala.



Bither

Bither comes to Wuerzburg from West Point, N.Y., where he was deputy commander for health services chief nurse at the medical department activity there. He is joined in command by his wife Cheryl and their sons, Patrick, Corey and Mathew.

Homas recently returned from Afghanistan where, while assigned to the 25th Infantry Division, he served as command surgeon for Combined/Joint Task Force 76 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He is joined in command by wife Tanja and sons Zachary and Ethan. Their oldest son, Nicholas, is beginning his college studies this year.